

## El Monte Union \$6 million deficit hits adult school

By Maritza Velazquez, *SGVN San Gabriel Valley Tribune*

Posted:

sgvtribune.com

EL MONTE - Under the gun to address a \$6.2 million budget deficit for the upcoming fiscal year, El Monte Union High School District board members Wednesday approved a list of cuts, largely targeting the district's more than 20,000-student adult school program and hitting all district administrators with a pay cut.

"It's excruciating," Board President Carlos Salcedo said of the budget reductions. "I've been in education for 20 years and I think what we're having to do is a travesty."

Like district's across California, El Monte Union High School District has suffered from decreased funding from the state, resulting in more than \$61 million in cuts since the 2007-08 school year.

The latest \$6.2 million deficit amounts to approximately 7 percent of the district's total annual expenditures of about \$90 million.

While other district's handle deficits as they come, El Monte Union is in program improvement, under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. That means it had until Wednesday to come up with a Fiscal Stabilization Plan, as mandated by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) to address achievement gaps.

While some board members lamented not having more time to make decisions about the cuts, the district's teacher union President Cathy Satterfield scolded the board and administration for not preparing for the major reductions in advance, as they knew for months the County would require the Fiscal Stabilization Plan.

"It's as if you are frat boys in college waiting and cramming for your finals the night before they occurred," she said. "That is unconscionable. You are are talking about the physical well being of this district. Shame on you."

The plan addresses the district's shortfall in the 2012-13 fiscal year in addition to ongoing savings through 2015.

El Monte Union's adult school was among the hardest hit programs. Although the district is still in the midst of restructuring positions, it is estimated that about 15 part-time adult school positions will be cut. The adult school's summer school program will also be restructured and reduced and adult classes at Potrero School will be eliminated. Parent education and ESL classes will be 30 minutes shorter, cut from four hours long to three-and-a-half hours.

In addition, the district will begin charging adult school registration fees, with the exception of classes offered at the secondary education level such as ESL and high school diploma courses. While those living within district boundaries will pay between \$50 to \$100 in enrollment fees, those outside of the district will begin paying \$300.

Some adult school employees pleaded Wednesday for the district to lessen the impact on the program.

"What I'm asking is that the burden of our shortfall be spread out on a broader basis, which will lessen the negative impact on the programs focused in the plan," said Wayne Miyahara, an adult school ESL teacher.

The original recommended savings plan also included a one-month cut in pay for eight adult school administrators. The board ultimately spread that cut more evenly to all 38 district administrators - equating to

a 1.5 percent paycut.

Also among the district-wide changes is the elimination of seven positions (in addition to the adult education cuts), a reduction in technology, book and supply purchases, and a 60 percent reduction in district travel and conference spending.

The plan also calls for a slight increase in student-teacher ratios, and a more significant increase in student-counselor ratios.

If Gov. Jerry Brown's \$6.9 billion tax increase initiative fails in November, the district would be required to fill an additional \$3.6 million budget shortfall.

El Monte Union also plans to sell two properties to generate more revenue in the future.

Some board members Wednesday requested more time to review potential options for cuts before making a final decision, but a LACOE official said they needed to take action because of the looming deadline that day.

"In this resolution, the board, in a public environment is saying `we resolve, we promise to make these cuts,'" said LACOE consultant Barry Dragon.

However, the board does still have some flexibility and can make changes as long as it results in the same amount of savings, he said.

Board member Juanita Gonzalez grilled administrators on spending practices and was visibly frustrated on being forced to make a decision.

She wanted to see surveys submitted by various stakeholders first.

It was a contention mostly voiced by teachers, who said their recommendations weren't included in the suggested list of cuts.

That list was based on several meetings with the Superintendent's Budget Advisory Committee, comprised of community members, teachers, staff, students and other district groups, according to Chief Business Official Ryan Di Giulio.

That group will continue to meet, he said.

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